

March 13, 2023

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Nikka Turner. I am a resident of Westchester County. I work as a Behavior Interventionist & a Building steward At Norwalk City School District. I offer the following testimony in support of **HB 6881 An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators.**

I would like to speak on behalf of Paraprofessionals' voice to be declared for the low income wages.

Here are my focus points and experience.

Paraprofessionals “are a part of the foundation of our schools and deserve a livable wage. Paraprofessionals are more hands-on: a lot of physical things happen in the classroom where we have to deal with behavioral challenges, provide 1;1 learning support , small group instruction & assist medically fragile students in the use of toileting. As well as ride the school bus to pick & drop off students and lastly translate ESL to learners .

About a quarter of paraprofessionals say their child or children qualified for free or reduced-price meals at school, 19 percent have visited a food pantry, 18 percent have participated in Medicaid, 16 percent have received food stamps, and 14 percent have received emergency assistance with utility bills and/or rent.

We need and deserve to make living wages for our families. Here are some examples of how it affects myself and many others.

“We can’t pay our rent , auto insurance , -parent share fees for childcare , copayments for medical expenses and lastly to buy food .

We have to apply for public assistance such as food stamps, assistance with rental arrears and child subsidies for childcare , all those things that go with being underpaid and low income people. Moreover Mental health gets Jeopardize , Evictions are violent

The threats can impact our livelihoods and low wages paralyzes the people.

Please honor our wage increase, After rising inflation the cost of living has increased.

The district can't retain employees. They should be at full-time status at 37.5 Hours Instead of 27.5 hours to continue their earning ability.

We should be guaranteed more money throughout the year and maybe some staff might return the next school year. The lowest earners for Special Education Paraprofessionals earned about \$35,740 per year.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, the highest earners made about \$104,790 annually.

In the end, a percentage of students who are in the classroom learning will make up the largest age group of those experiencing poverty.

Respectfully,

Nikka